

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Gary Bennett Expired CRP Break Request
Proposed Implementation Date:	Spring 2024
Proponent:	Gary Bennett
Location:	T23N R9E Section 34, W2NE4, NW4SE4
County:	Chouteau
Trust:	MSU Morrill

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Gary Bennett has requested to break approximately 81.9 acres of recently expired CRP and return the land to agricultural production.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:

Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.

Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC)
Northeastern Land Office (NELO)
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP)
Gary Bennett, Lessee

2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:

The DNRC, and NELO have jurisdiction over this proposed project.

The proponent is responsible for performing all required actions to stay in conservation compliance with the 2018 Farm Bill and shall be in contact with the Chouteau County USDA offices.

DNRC is not aware of any other agencies with jurisdiction or other permits needed to complete this project

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A (No Action) – Under this alternative, the Department does not grant a break request for the area of potential effect (APE).

Alternative B (the Proposed Action) – Under this alternative, the Department does grant a break request for the APE.

III. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:

Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks provided input on the breaking of CRP to return to annual production.

Any breaking of permanent vegetative cover and conversion to grain production will not be positive for wildlife species in general, and specifically problematic for ground nesting birds, small mammals, upland game birds, mule deer and antelope populations. Converting these parcel to small grain production reduces the wildlife values on a larger scale than just the parcel itself. Because of those considerations I would ask that DNRC not allow these tracts to be broken.

If it is to be broken, I ask that all drainages be buffered by an additional minimum of 50 feet to allow nesting cover for upland game birds, song birds, and avoidance of a predator sink.

The area is not considered critical wildlife habitat.

No Action: No change in terrestrial and avian habitats.

Proposed Action: Potential nesting habitat for various avian species will be lost with the removal of permanent vegetation. Addition of a small grain crop will increase forage availability for those wildlife species that utilize grain.

9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:

Consider any federally listed threatened or endangered species or habitat identified in the project area. Determine effects to wetlands. Consider Sensitive Species or Species of special concern. Identify cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.

A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program for Species of Concern (SOC) showed no species of concern near the area of potential effect.

Current habitat is tame grass prairie.

No Action: No change to unique, endangered, fragile or environmental resources.

Proposed Action: Removal of permanent vegetative cover may have a negative effect on the wildlife species that traverse the area.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

A Class I (literature review) level review was conducted by the DNRC staff archaeologist for the area of potential effect (APE). This entailed inspection of project maps, DNRC's sites/site leads database, land use records, General Land Office Survey Plats, and control cards. The Class I search results revealed that no cultural or paleontological resources have been identified in the APE, but it should be noted that Class III level inventory work has not been conducted there to date.

Because the entire APE was previously cultivated, re-breaking the ground will have No Effect to Antiquities. No additional archaeological investigative work will be conducted in response to this proposed development.

No Action: No effect on historical or archaeological sites.

No Action: No change to industrial, commercial or agriculture activities and production.

Proposed Action: This project will add to existing agricultural activities in this area.

16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:

Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to the employment market.

No Action: No change to employment.

Proposed Action: The project will not create any new jobs. These positions are already held by employees of the proponent.

17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:

Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.

No Action: No change to local or state tax base.

Proposed Action: Increased revenue may occur if the field is put into small grain production.

18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:

Estimate increases in traffic and changes to traffic patterns. What changes would be needed to fire protection, police, schools, etc.? Identify cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services

No Action: No change in government services.

Proposed Action: There will not be any increases in traffic or traffic patterns if this project is approved.

19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:

List State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, and other zoning or management plans, and identify how they would affect this project.

No Action: No change.

Proposed Action: There are no zoning or other agency management plans affecting this project.

20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:

Identify any wilderness or recreational areas nearby or access routes through this tract. Determine the effects of the project on recreational potential within the tract. Identify cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

No Action: No change in recreational activities present.

Proposed Action: Removal of suitable nesting habitat for game birds may have a negative effect on the population sizes that are desired by sportsmen. Tracts are accessible by county road for recreational purposes and the removal of permanent vegetation may eliminate an area used by hunters.

I have selected the Proposed Alternative B, and recommend the proponent be granted permission to break out the expired CRP and put the field into small grain production.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

I have evaluated the potential environment effects and have determined that no negative long-term environmental impacts will result from the proposed activity.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

☐


EIS

☐

More Detailed EA

XXX

No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Clive Rooney
	Title: Area Manager, Northeastern Land Office
Signature: 	Date: 6/9/23